

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE**

Methods and systems for inspecting a reticle are provided. In an embodiment, a method may include forming an aerial image of the reticle using a set of exposure  
5 conditions. The reticle may include optical proximity correction (OPC) features. The method may also include detecting defects on the reticle by comparing the aerial image to a reference image stored in a database. The reference image may be substantially optically equivalent to an image of the reticle that would be printed on a specimen by an exposure system under the set of exposure conditions. The reference image may not  
10 include images of the OPC features. Therefore, a substantial portion of the defects include defects that would be printed onto the specimen by the exposure system using the reticle under the set of exposure conditions. The method may also include indicating the defects that are detected in critical regions of the reticle.

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